

### Question #1:

Could a flexiplace supervisor be accused of discrimination if he/she permits one employee to take advantage of the flexiplace work system and not another? If participants are solicited, what basis can be used for supervisory rejection?

### ANSWER:

Telecommuting is not an employee benefit, nor an entitlement program, but rather an alternative method of meeting the needs of the command and the Department of the Navy. Employees do not have the right to work at an alternative work-site. Additionally, management or the employee may terminate the flexiplace arrangement at any time, so long as the reason is job related. Employees selected for alternative work-site arrangements must meet and adhere to specific criteria. In addition, the employee's supervisor must be willing to participate in this arrangement. However, the supervisor cannot be unwilling due to a discriminatory or non-job related reason. This alternative work arrangement is no different than any other "voluntary" program. Thus, management must assure that all employees are treated equally and given the opportunity to participate if they meet the specific criteria and have a willing supervisor to serve as a proponent of the program.

Employees not selected to participate in the program may make allegations of discrimination. However, if management has treated all employees equally and the reason for not selecting the employee is job related those allegations should be easily defeated. Decisions regarding the use of flexiplace must be subject to the same standards as other management practices.

### Question #2:

Who does the work-site inspection and what guidelines are used to ensure it is suitable and safe? Why is it felt that supervisors have the proper training to inspect flexiplace work-sites when they don't have this responsibility at the traditional work-site? If supervisors are given this responsibility, what will ensure uniformity of inspection? Who is liable if a supervisor approved, for example, an overloaded electrical circuit that subsequently results in a fire or personal injury?

### ANSWER:

Activity Health and Safety Officers should normally conduct inspections of workstations at alternative work-sites. Information concerning the provision of alternative work-site inspections may be found at the GSA World Wide Web site. This web site provides design/inspection guidelines for home office or telecenter workstations. In addition, one of the criteria for entry into the telecommuting program is the requirement for home-

based telecommuters to complete a self-certification checklist of their workstation.

**Question #3:**

Does an employee bill the employer for use of what he or she thinks is reasonable for work space, light, telephone service, and other work related expenses?

**ANSWER:**

The Government assumes no responsibility for the telecommuter's expenses related to heating, electricity, water, telephone and space usage. If the prospective telecommuter is not agreeable to this arrangement, then he/she does not meet the criteria of the program.

**Question #4:**

How does a supervisor monitor leave and attendance to ensure payment is made only for work performed?

**ANSWER:**

Employees selected to participate in the telecommuting program must exemplify the following characteristics:

- Demonstrated self-starter who can function independently and has demonstrated dependability.
- Is highly motivated.
- Have good time management skills.
- Is trustworthy.

Thus, supervisors of telecommuters must assure that time and attendance is in compliance with the U.S. General Accounting Office's "Policy and Procedures Manual for the Guidance to Federal Agencies (Title 6)." These guidelines require agencies with employees working at remote sites to provide reasonable assurance that they are working when scheduled. Such assurance can be achieved by the supervisor's determination of the reasonableness of work output for time spent or by e-mail and occasionally telephoning the telecommuter. The telecommuting agreement signed by the employee has a provision for unannounced visits to the alternative work-site during assigned work hours. The technique of determining reasonableness of work output for time spent is consistent with managing by results. In addition, if through past experience a prospective telecommuter is deemed untrustworthy, then he/she should not be allowed to participate in the program.

**Question #5:**

Will DON commands be provided additional funds to pay for equipment needs?

**ANSWER:**

Many telecommuters are willing to provide their own equipment for home workstations. There are no immediate plans to provide DON activities with additional funding for flexiplace work arrangements. Local commands may provide such funding at their discretion. However, DON commands are not required to provide equipment at alternative work-sites.

**Question #6:**

Why should supervisors open themselves up to the time consuming process of a negotiated grievance procedure? Wouldn't supervisors be more apt to give the program a try if they could simply terminate an employee from the program with no risk of getting involved with lengthy grievance or appeal procedure?

**ANSWER:**

Flexiplace is a management option rather than an employee benefit or right. Employees may be terminated from the program at anytime as long as the termination is based upon job related issues. Employees can file a grievance or an EEO complaint that could involve a lengthy administrative procedure.

**Question #7:**

Will the government pay to send repairmen to the various home-sites to service equipment? Who will authorize the repair calls?

**ANSWER:**

Department of the Navy commands are responsible for the service and maintenance of Government-owned equipment. Commands may require the telecommuter to bring the equipment back to the office when it is inoperable. During periods when the telecommuter is unable to use his/her workstation equipment, (and if the equipment is needed to complete job related tasks) then that individual must be required to report back to his/her duty station. Telecommuters using their own equipment are responsible for its service and maintenance.

**Question #8:**

There appears to be an assumption of reduced overhead with the implementation of this policy. People working at home will require access to computers, fax machines, telephone lines, etc., which replicate the equipment at their normal work location. Therefore, people working under this policy would have plant account responsibility for two computers at a time when many organizations are having problems with ratios of personal computers to employees. Further, there will be a need to procure additional fax machines (or to procure and install fax modems in government-owned or employee-owned computers) for use at home.

**ANSWER:**

Significant empirical data are available which supports the potential employer benefits of implementing a telecommuting program. Some of these potential benefits include: Improved quality of work output, Reduced overhead, Increased productivity, Improved employee recruiting, Improved employee retention/decreased turnover, and Reduced absenteeism and Sick leave.

Additionally, DON commands are not required to provide equipment at alternative work-sites. Many prospective telecommuters are willing to provide their own equipment.

**Question #9:**

Sharing of information by multiple users at remote sites may prove to be an untenable task. There needs to be backup capability by other employees to cover those periods when the primary employee is sick. In today's environment, a supervisor can easily monitor the daily work of his/her employees. Under the Department's telecommuting arrangements that capability will be lost, or at least made much more difficult.

**ANSWER:**

The telecommuter's work performance should be monitored in the same manner as main work-site performance. Employee performance should be monitored on a results-oriented basis. In addition, work progress reporting procedures should be incorporated into the agreement signed by the employee.

**Question #10:**

If a DON employee is interested in using one of the GSA sponsored Telecenters in the National Capitol area who will pay the cost of procuring additional office space? Expecting DON commands to bear the cost will most likely not result in either an enthusiastic embracing of the flexiplace concept. Similarly, in today's tight budget environment, gaining sponsor approval for procuring additional resources may be fraught with disaster.

**ANSWER:**

Under a Telecommuting Pilot Program established by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), DON commands can utilize these facilities at no cost.